OVERVIEW OF VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION CEMETERY SYSTEMS

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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OVERVIEW OF THE VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION CEMETERY SYSTEM

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 1982

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice at 9:30 a.m., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Marvin Leath presiding.

Members present: Marvin Leath, Robert McEwen, and Antonio Borja Won Pat.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN LEATH

Mr. LEATH. The hearing will come to order.

Mr. Sawyer is just getting off the plane, I understand. He may get here before we finish but I think we can go ahead.

We meet today to hear the overview of the Veterans' Administration national cemetery system.

During my years of service on this committee and particularly, during the past year in which I have been privileged to be chairman of the subcommittee, I have become increasingly aware of the pride my fellow countrymen have in honoring those who served in our country in war and peace.

The national or State veterans cemetery is more than a final resting place for the Nation's veterans. It is an everlasting monument to the extreme sacrifices and efforts they've made to preserve this Nation's freedom.

Since the enactment in 1973 of Public Law 93-43, which provided for the transfer of the national cemetery system from the Department of Army to the Veterans' Administration, many improvements have been made in the system.

I am satisfied that it is well run and I am proud of it. My concern is that of the 107 cemeteries in the system, grave space is available in 55. Twenty-five of these open cemeteries are located in just 7 States which leaves 21 States with either no national cemetery or no open gravesites.

In 1978, Congress passed Public Law 95-476, which authorized the Federal Government to make grants to States in establishing, expanding, or improving veterans cemeteries owned by the State.

Frankly, I have been somewhat disappointed in the lack of interest shown by the States in this program. I note with interest and pleasure that interest has begun to pick up in the past 6 months.

With this period of fiscal restraint the Nation is experiencing, I am hopeful that we can develop more cemeteries for our veterans, using the most economical means possible and yet keeping the dignity and respect that cemeteries for veterans deserve.

I hope that our discussions this morning will allow us to discuss this matter more fully.

Our first witness this morning comes to us for the first time. It's a pleasure to welcome the Chief Memorial Affairs Director, Department of Memorial Affairs, Veterans' Administration, Mr. Paul Bannai, who has quite a distinguished list of accomplishments in both the public and private sector.

Mr. Bannai, we're indeed happy to have you here with us this morning. The subcommittee will look forward to working with you and the continuing improvement of something that I know is as important to you as it is to us.

We have several other witnesses this morning in addition to Mr. Bannai and we have received a number of statements for the record and without objection, those statements will be entered fully in the record.

So, Mr. Bannai, at this point if you would, we'd be happy for you to submit your testimony in any way that you would like to. Your entire statement will be included in the record, so you can summarize or whatever you would like to do.

STATEMENT OF PAUL T. BANNAI, CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BANNAI. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It's a pleasure to be here and to meet you for the first time in committee. Of all the areas of Texas, the area you represent is the closest to me. It's a place that I know very well.

On behalf of the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, Mr. Nimmo, I want to express my thanks for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs this morning.

First, I would like to introduce my associates who will participate with me today and, if there are any questions, will be able to assist me.

On my right is Leonard Malamud from the Office of the General Counsel and on my left is my Deputy, Vincent Corrado, who all of you, I'm sure, very well know.

To my back is Gary Cole, who is my budget officer, and also Frank Granito and his staff from the Office of Construction.

I have submitted a complete statement; however, with your permission and in the interest of saving time, I would like to summarize my statement.

The provision of adequate gravesites to meet the burial needs of our Nation's veterans and their dependents is a principal concern of the Veterans' Administration. The VA is meeting those burial needs by the establishment of new national cemeteries, expansion of the existing national cemeteries, and implementation of the State cemetery grant program.

The Veterans' Administration has achieved its objective of designating one large national cemetery in each of the 10 standard Fed-

eral regions and one in the Washington, D.C. area. Construction of four of those cemeteries has not yet been completed.

In region III, the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, Pa., is scheduled to open this fall; in region V, the post cemetery portion of Fort Custer National Cemetery, Mich., will open in the spring of 1982; and in the Washington, D.C. area, the Quantico National Cemetery in Virginia will open in the spring of 1983. In region IV, the change of site location from Fort Gillem, Ga., to Fort Mitchell, Ala., has caused some delay in the start of construction.

A supplemental environmental impact statement should be completed in June of this year. Work on the master plan by the architect engineer firm is expected to begin in September 1982.

Construction is estimated to begin in January 1985 and be completed in the summer of 1987, with the cemetery open for interment in the fall of 1987.

In addition to the region IV cemetery at Fort Mitchell, Administrator Nimmo determined that a new national cemetery was needed in Florida. The site for the cemetery will be determined after completion of the environmental impact statement that is now in progress. A site determination is anticipated about March 1983.

Along with the establishment of new regional cemeteries, the VA has continued its policy of expanding existing national cemeteries, where feasible, to extend the longevity of those cemeteries. Only suitable land that is adjacent to the cemetery and donated to the VA is considered for cemetery expansion.

The Grafton National Cemetery in West Virginia and the Florence National Cemetery in South Carolina, for example, will be considered for expansion if suitable land is made available for that purpose.

In the case of Hawaii, the VA National Cemetery of the Pacific is expected to close to in-ground interments in October 1982. And there is no possibility to expand that cemetery. Two sites of excess Federal properties on the Island of Oahu have been identified as having the greatest potential for a new national cemetery. An environmental impact statement will be prepared and upon completion, a decision will be made on the feasibility of establishing a new national cemetery in Hawaii.

The State cemetery grants program, which complements the national cemetery system was authorized by Congress in 1978, as you mentioned, specifically, to alleviate the shortage of burial plots in certain geographic areas. The program accommodates veterans who live far from a national cemetery and who wish to be buried in their home State. Twenty-four States have expressed interest in the program. So far, six grants totalling $1.3 million have been awarded and 11 applications for grants totaling $6.7 million are pending. We think it is an excellent program and we strongly encourage participation by those States in which it is not feasible for the Federal Government to establish a national cemetery.

That highlights our major activities, Mr. Chairman. And now, I'd like to address some of the innovations the VA has introduced to insure the most efficient and economical use of cemetery land.

We have reduced the size of gravesites in our national cemeteries—the 4 foot by 8 foot gravesite, which will be used in new burial

sections and in our new cemeteries. The reduced gravesite size will result in reduced development and maintenance costs per gravesite, and will ultimately extend the longevity of our cemeteries.

Along with the reduced gravesite size, the VA adopted the policy to provide flat markers in all new burial sections and in our new cemeteries. This plan will provide less costly monuments and will facilitate maintenance operations.

Another innovation to extend the longevity of our national cemeteries or reopen closed cemeteries, is the use of garden niches for the interment of cremated remains. The garden niches will be located on cemetery lands unsuitable for the interment of casketed remains: on hills or walkways, for example, or along the perimeter of fences. This alternative was adopted to eliminate the costly construction of additional columbaria.

One other notable change in our headstone and marker program was made through the expansion of our data processing capability. The automated activity will reduce the present voluminous amount of paperwork and enable the Veterans' Administration to ultimately provide better and faster service to veterans and their families.

And now, Mr. Chairman, I will address the VA response to the contracting-out requirements of the Office of Management and Budget, Circular A-76, as it relates to the Department of Memorial Affairs.

The Veterans' Administration determined that contracting out for the national cemetery system would be limited to the maintenance of cemetery grounds, buildings, and equipment, where feasible and cost-effective.

The Baltimore National Cemetery was selected as the pilot station for organizing and conducting the review process. The cost reviews at other national cemeteries will be patterned after the in-house procedures used at Baltimore.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you again on behalf of Mr. Nimmo, the Administrator, for the opportunity to appear before you and your subcommittee today.

And of course, I will be pleased to answer any questions that you have. I have my staff and other people who will assist me.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bannai appears on p. 13.]

Mr. LEATH. Thank you, Mr. Bannai. We appreciate those remarks. I do have a few questions here and I'm sure that my colleague, Mr. Won Pat, will have some for you.

In 1973 the VA adopted what is known as the regional concept. It's a term used in connection with the expansion of the national cemetery system. Simply stated, of course, the regional concept provides for one large cemetery in each of the 10 standard regions.

There's been one additional cemetery in the Washington, D.C. area to compensate for the loss of burial entitlement of most veterans in the Arlington National Cemetery.

The VA states it has adhered strictly to this concept, yet in 1981 the VA announced a new national cemetery in Florida. Does this mean that the regional concept has been changed?

Mr. BANNAI. No, it does not. We are going to stay with the regional concept.

However, there was a need for a cemetery in Florida, a State with 1.3 million veterans and the Administrator determined that need due to the influx we have in the Florida area of about 5,000 additional veterans each month. There is only one cemetery which is open down in Florida. That is at Barrancas. Barrancas will be closing in the late 1980's. It is at the extreme end of the Florida panhandle and not readily accessible to the rest of the State.

In order to take care of the veterans who are in great numbers in that particular part of the State, we felt that we should look into the possibility of opening a cemetery there, and that is underway. There's an environmental impact report going to be made on two Florida sites, and that should be completed early next year.

Mr. LEATH. Have there been any additional studies in any of the other Sun Belt areas, where you have or are having considerable influxes of veterans such as you have in Florida?

Mr. BANNAI. No, we haven't. With the establishment of the cemetery at Fort Mitchell that should help take care of the veteran population increase. And, of course, as you know, we are expanding the existing cemeteries in Texas where feasible. The only other area where we do have a concern is the projected phasing out and the unavailability of additional land at the Willamette National Cemetery in Oregon.

We are looking at Federal excess land reports. But that's down the line a few years and we anticipate that by the time the land is used up there, we will have found a suitable replacement to fulfill the needs of the people that are moving into the Northwest United States area.

Mr. LEATH. What expansion plans do you have in Texas?

Mr. BANNAI. In that particular area?

Mr. LEATH. Yes.

Mr. BANNAI. Well, there aren't any additional cemeteries planned but we are developing cemetery land at our regional cemetery in Houston, which is expected to remain open for new interments beyond the year 2000. We have Fort Bliss, of course, which is open, near El Paso on the other end of Texas, and that has sufficient space to provide interments beyond the year 2000.

Fort Sam Houston is doing about 1,900 interments per year and that should be open until the latter part of the 1900's.

Mr. LEATH. I note from your opening statement, that by 1990, you project 70,000 burials in national cemeteries. Since that is some 8 years off, it seems that planning for this eventuality should certainly begin very soon.

Will the cemeteries now in being, and those planned, be sufficient to provide for the projected interments? If not, what future plans do you think we might have to handle that?

Mr. BANNAI. With the completion of the four regional national cemeteries that I spoke about, which should provide available grave space for the next 40 to 60 years, we are also looking at other areas of expansion, or shall we say, extending the life of the cemeteries. And we can say that we are prepared for that long range projection that we gave you.

Mr. LEATH. Mr. Bannai, we want to ask you a few more questions here but if my colleague, Mr. Won Pat, would agree, since our colleague Mr. Nichols has just come in——

Bill, we'd like for you to come up at this time. If one of you gentlemen would let Congressman Nichols have your spot there. I know he has a very busy schedule and we certainly want to welcome one of the most distinguished Members of Congress to our humble subcommittee this morning.

Mr. Chairman, we're pleased and delighted to have you and would certainly be most receptive to any wisdom you would like to send our way this morning.

STATEMENT OF HON. BILL NICHOLS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Flattery will get you everywhere in this game.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here on the day that you're talking about veterans cemeteries. And I would want these gentlemen from Veterans' Administration to know that I come here as a friend and not as an adversary.

We are most appreciative that the administrator has seen fit to place the regional cemetery at Fort Mitchell, Ala. I speak this morning for my colleague, Jack Brinkley who is just across the line on the Georgia side, as well as myself in saying that after numerous past Administrators have been to our area and considered numerous other sites in the southeast early last year Mr. Nimmo made this very important decision.

So, Mr. Chairman, the purpose of my coming before your committee this morning is just to emphasize, if I might, the tremendous amount of local interest that has been generated in behalf of getting on with the job down there.

Now, Mr. Brinkley and I have had several sessions with the Veterans' Administration Cemetery Group and we are most appreciative for their complete cooperation and pledge of expediting this as best they can.

We have before us, Mr. Chairman, a schedule here, which projects that the cemetery now that the decision has been made, would not be actually open until October of 1987.

That's better than 5 years away. And it just appears to us, Mr. Brinkley and myself, that there ought to be some way to speed this up. We have looked at this schedule and it would seem to us that there are two particular areas that might be compressed, if they might, Mr. Chairman.

One of them is the area in which we have set aside for land acquisition. We believe that from the State of Alabama's standpoint there's a land tradeoff that's involved in this thing. That we're about ready to make that trade with the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Department of Interior who has an interest in it as well.

So, we don't see where that should take until November 1983 to consummate that land trade.

The other area that I want to mention just briefly is, I believe we're talking about initial area which is to be converted to a veterans cemetery in this approximately 280 or 300 acre tract. I've forgotten the exact size of it.

The first phase would encompass about 20 acres, Mr. Chairman. And that is scheduled to begin construction in January of 1985. And the cemetery then would open in October 1987. That's better than 2½ years from the time we start moving dirt. And having had a little experience in grading and moving dirt and planting trees and grass sodding and so forth, it would just appear to us that that might be speeded up.

And I don't know what the decorum here of the committee might be, but if it's possible, we'd like some assurance from these gentlemen that they might have that in mind.

Mr. LEATH. Mr. Chairman, I think it's perfectly in order. As a matter of fact, one of the questions that I was going to pose to Mr. Bannai is right along that same line. It's what the current status of Fort Mitchell is and why it is taking so long. Certainly, I think that it would be appropriate at this time to ask for a response and go ahead and discuss that at this point.

Mr. Bannai, do you have anything on that?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, one of the things that we did was to make a change in the statement which we have tendered to you. Rather than in 1987, we have moved that up to 1986. The completion of Fort Mitchell, as Mr. Nichols says, shouldn't take us that long and we have asked and we have gotten a corrected date of a year and a half sooner.

However, in order to get underway and to keep us on schedule, there are some legal technicalities that Mr. Malamud perhaps, can allude to and explain. Because everything must go on schedule, like maps, planning, et cetera. Much depends on when and if this legal issue is settled.

Mr. NICHOLS. I don't want to take up the committee's time on a little personal matter down there. I'm generally familiar with the issue but it's my understanding that the Department of Interior has made a commitment that they're satisfied that the State is acting in good faith on this.

We believe the entire matter from the State of Alabama's standpoint will be consummated by July of this year, we are told. Hopefully that might speed it up some.

Mr. Chairman, I have no further request for time and I want you to know I'm most appreciative for your generosity in letting me come up here in the middle of a hearing and present my case.

Mr. LEATH. We're delighted to have you. Your concern for and interest in the national defense of this country and those who have served in that defense, the veterans, is well documented by the outstanding record that you have in this Congress and we're just pleased and delighted to have you here.

Let me assure you that the subcommittee will work with Mr. Bannai. I know that they will want to do this as quickly as possible and if they can cut any of the redtape that can be cut, I'm sure those outstanding lawyers on his staff over there will see to it that it's done.

So, we'll attempt to keep a close eye on this because I totally agree with you that it should be speeded up.

My colleague, Mr. Won Pat, do you have any comments you'd like to make to Chairman Nichols before he——

Mr. WON PAT. Mr. Chairman, I just want to join you in your expression of understanding and, of course, in welcoming our distinguished colleague. He is my chairman in the Subcommittee of Military Personnel in the Armed Services. And I have a very high respect for him.

His record and, of course, his dedication to our Nation is unparalleled, I would say.

Mr. LEATH. Thank you, Mr. Won Pat. Mr. McEwen, do you have any?

Mr. MCEWEN. I would just echo the comments of my colleagues here in the subcommittee and say that in my brief tenure in the Congress, I consider Mr. Nichols one of my heroes and I mean that.

Mr. LEATH. I think you can see our feeling is unanimous, Chairman Nichols. And we're pleased and delighted to have you.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You're very kind to an old soldier.

Mr. LEATH. Now, that Mr. McEwen has arrived, I'd like to give him an opportunity to ask any questions he might have at this point.

Mr. Bannai had just completed his statement and I had asked him a couple of questions and if you have any comments at this point that you'd like to make, then we can go on.

Mr. MCEWEN. Later, if I may.

Mr. LEATH. Sure, be glad for you to hold them.

Mr. Won Pat, do you have any questions at this point that you'd like to present to the group?

Mr. WON PAT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As one representing the most remote part of this Nation, Guam, as you know we have several thousand veterans in Guam. And probably you know that Guam is practically a military outpost since it was acquired way back in 1898 from the Spanish.

Since then Guam was a military domain and many of our young men and women throughout the years have joined the service. Many of them, of course, have passed away. But our major problem on the island today, of course, is finding a place of burial.

As you know, Mr. Bannai, is that the correct pronounciation? Up to the present time, if you want to have one of our veterans buried, then Hawaii seems to be the only place that our veterans could be buried unless they are buried in the local cemetery there which is a Catholic cemetery. Of course, we do have another one there that is owned by another denomination.

But those who are in the service and have died—they are buried in the naval cemetery there. I understand now that that is costing so much. I have some complaints from Guam, from those military people about the high cost of burial there.

Now, to bury somebody, a veteran, in Hawaii, the cost of transportation, in addition to the people who will be accompanying them and other incidental expense is great.

Now, do you have plans for a cemetery on Guam?

Mr. BANNAI. We do not have plans for a cemetery on Guam because the regional concept and the guidelines that we've been given have precluded doing that. I did check into that.

However, I happen to know the distance as I've flown quite a number of times from Guam to Hawaii, and I know the problems that you have in trying to take care of the veteran there.

The people that were interested in establishing a cemetery for veterans in Guam have approached us with a request under the State grant program for approximately $2 million.

We have taken that, as you know, beyond the Administrator with a special request for waiver so that it would not have to be a matching grant.

I've asked our director who handles the State matching grants to work, to expedite and to assist Guam in every way to establish their own cemetery.

I can assure you that as long as I am there, I and all of my staff will work toward that. It will not be, of course, a national cemetery. The veterans' population is insufficient to support a national cemetery.

But we would like very much to take care of the needs of the people who are veterans on Guam, and we're working toward that.

Now, are you aware of the economic difficulty we have with respect to the construction of a cemetery? We seriously doubt that we could provide the necessary matching amount and also the other phase for the construction of a cemetery.

Do you have any recommendation whereby we can alleviate that problem on our part?

Mr. BANNAI. As I indicated, the matching grant program was set up by Congress and we have to abide by those particular rules. But I think that if there was a waiver granted on that particular phase of it, you should not have to come up with 50 percent of the funding.

That may be possibly one way in which to get your cemetery by applying for the money which we have allocated for matching grants to States, getting a waiver on your portion and under that provision build your cemetery.

That would just be a suggestion on my part.

Mr. WON PAT. Is there any alternative to that plan? Now, the Navy has a cemetery. I'm sure the Navy would like to do away with that or perhaps the Navy and the Veterans' Administration could, I mean, work together and have, what you call a joint-use cemetery.

Mr. BANNAI. That's a possibility. As you know, many of the cemeteries that we have in the Veterans' Administration, are those that originally were from hospitals or military installations.

For instance, we're taking over and opening in a very few months, the post cemetery at Fort Custer, Mich. Then the adjoining lands will be expanded into a veterans' cemetery.

I'd be very happy to look into it. I really don't know whether we've explored that particular avenue. Maybe Mr. Corrado could provide additional information. Have we ever looked at the Naval Cemetery there in Guam?

Mr. CORRADO. Yes, sir, we looked at it some years ago. The problem is the fact that it doesn't belong to the Navy and for us to take it over and make it into a national cemetery would not be economically feasible, if you'll pardon the expression, due to the fact that

there aren't a sufficient number of veterans out there to warrant that type of expenditure.

For that reason, we have sought and even proposed that Guam may want to consider taking the cemetery over from the Navy and converting it into a state veterans' cemetery. That is also a possibility.

As Mr. Bannai pointed out, it isn't a question of a matching grant on the part of Guam. It is a matter that we would provide 100 percent of the cost of establishing a state veterans' cemetery on Guam.

Mr. WON PAT. What would Navy do then if the veterans take it over?

Mr. CORRADO. I think very simply there could be established a joint usage plan between the territory of Guam and the Navy facilities on the territory of Guam.

Mr. WON PAT. That could be done, I believe. That could be more acceptable to all concerned. It would be to the best interests of all to have a study look into that possibility?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, evidently we've looked into it from the standpoint of the Veterans' Administration taking over the Navy facility, which indicated it was economically not feasible.

The other alternative which you might consider is making it a state cemetery, and as indicated, earlier you could get your waiver on the $2 million that you've requested. That paperwork is well underway. That as I recall the legislation, that State grant program is for expansion or setting up of new cemeteries in the state, for, possibly in this particular instance, taking over and working with the Navy as a state cemetery.

So, those are possibilities. If you need assistance on it, I'm sure that we'd be able to help you on that particular phase. We'd certainly be happy to get together with you.

Mr. WON PAT. Thank you, Mr. Bannai.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't want to take more of the committee's time. But I would look forward toward working with you.

Mr. BANNAI. Surely.

Mr. LEATH. Thank you, Mr. Bannai and your staff. We appreciate your presence very much. I do have some more questions that I'd like to submit to the record and you can answer at that point.[1] We appreciate very much your being here this morning.

We look forward to working with you.

Mr. BANNAI. Thank you very much.

Mr. LEATH. Our next witness is Mr. Stephen Edmiston, Associate Deputy National Legislative Director of the Disabled American Veterans.

Steve, we're delighted to welcome you before the subcommittee this morning and hear what we know will be some strong and sincere testimony from one of the outstanding veterans organizations.

You may proceed. I think you've been here enough to know what to do and how to do it.

Mr. EDMISTON. Thank you.

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[1] See p. 15.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN EDMISTON, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

Mr. EDMISTON. Thank you very much, sir.

It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the 706,000 members of the Disabled American Veterans.

Before I proceed with my remarks regarding the national cemetery system, I'd like to take a moment to express our appreciation for the help this subcommittee gave us last year in the enactment of legislation in Public Law 97-66, which authorized the VA to furnish appropriate memorial headstones and markers for certain deceased veterans as well as directing the VA to set aside, where available, suitable areas within national cemeteries to honor these deceased veterans.

We're most appreciative of that, Mr. Chairman.

As you know the VA operates and maintains the largest Federal cemetery system as a result of Public Law 93-43, which consolidated 82 Department of the Army national cemeteries and 21 VA hospital cemeteries under the jurisdiction of Veterans' Administration, back in September 1973.

Today the national cemetery system consists of 107 cemeteries, located in 35 of the contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Since the takeover of the VA cemetery system, we've had three new national cemeteries opened in Calverton, N.Y.; Riverside, Calif.; and Bourne, Mass.; and currently four others are under construction or planning.

Except for the development in existing national cemeteries the VA current program of expansion has been based on the philosophy of one national cemetery in each of the 10 designated Federal regions.

Quite frankly, the DAV has held the view that this regional concept of expansion is far too restrictive. Our organization, in accordance with a resolution adopted by the delegates to our most recent national convention, believe that expansion of the system should be based on a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one national cemetery in each State.

We feel that every eligible veteran should have the right to seek burial in a national cemetery that is reasonably close to the area in which he lives to facilitate personal maintenance and visitation by his survivors.

We certainly hope that the subcommittee will give some thought to our views on that, Mr. Chairman.

While the DAV does advocate this expansion of the national cemetery system on a State-by-State basis, we also recognize the current economic climate which exists in our Government and the fiscal constraints within which this subcommittee and indeed, the entire Congress, must work.

Therefore, given this atmosphere of fiscal austerity, one that will probably continue for some time, we would suggest to the subcommittee that greater utilization of the matching grants to States program for the construction, expansion, and improvement of State veteran cemeteries may very well be one avenue by which the Federal Government can offset the cost of new national cemetery con-

struction and still meet the veterans, burial needs. And at the same time, providing the States with the opportunity to share in the obligation of assisting this Nation's veterans.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman, and again I want to say it's a pleasure to appear before you this morning and I'll be more than happy to respond to any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Edmiston appears on p. —.]

Mr. LEATH. Thank you again. I can assure you that we will take those recommendations to heart.

Mr. Won Pat, do you have any questions?

Mr. WON PAT. I don't have any questions. I would like to commend the gentleman for his fine presentation.

Mr. EDMISTON. Thank you, Mr. Won Pat.

Mr. LEATH. Thank you very much. And I guess if there's no further business, then, we'll stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:15 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

STATEMENT OF PAUL T. BANNAI, CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee: On behalf of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Robert P. Nimmo, I thank you for the privilege to appear here today to present an evaluation of the National Cemetery System as administered by the Veterans Administration.

The provision of gravesites to meet the burial needs of our nation's veteran population is a principal concern of the Veterans Administration and an area in our National Cemetery System that generates the greatest impact in terms of money and operations. Today we have about 30 million veterans. It is estimated that some 11 million veterans or 37 percent of them will die in the next 18 years. Many of these veterans will be buried in national cemeteries. In fiscal year 1981, 41,811 veterans and their dependents were buried in national cemeteries. We estimate 43,000 burials in fiscal year 1982 and 45,000 in fiscal year 1983. By 1990, we project 70,000 burials in national cemeteries, and by the year 2000, 100,000 burials.

The VA is meeting veterans' burial needs through establishment of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries, and implementation of the State Cemetery Grants program.

The Veterans Administration has achieved its objective of designating one large national cemetery in each of the ten Standard Federal Regions and one in the Washington, D.C. area. Four of the designated cemeteries are still in the construction, design or planning stage: in Region III, the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, Pennsylvania, is scheduled to open this fall (1982); in Region V, the post cemetery portion of the Fort Custer National Cemetery, Michigan, will open in the spring of 1982; in the Washington, D.C. area, the Quantico National Cemetery, Virginia, will open in the spring of 1983; in Region IV, the change of site location last July (1981) from Fort Gillem, Georgia, to Fort Mitchell, Alabama, has caused some delays in the start of construction. A supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Fort Mitchell is being prepared and should be completed in June of 1982. Negotiations are nearing completion for the transfer of the property to the VA. An Architect/Engineer firm has been selected for the national cemetery Master Plan. Work on the Master Plan is expected to begin in September 1982, with scheduled completion for September 1983. Phase I construction, estimated to begin in January 1985, should be completed in the summer of 1987, and the cemetery opened for interment in the fall of 1987.

In addition to the Region IV cemetery at Fort Mitchell, Alabama, in July 1981 Administrator Nimmo determined that a new national cemetery was needed in Florida. The site for the cemetery will be selected upon completion and review of the Environmental Impact Statement that is now under preparation. A site determination is anticipated about March 1983.

Along with the establishment of new regional cemeteries, the VA has continued its policy of expanding existing national cemeteries, where feasible, to provide additional grave space and extend the longevity of those cemeteries. Only suitable land that is adjacent to the cemetery and donated to the VA is considered for cemetery expansion. The Grafton National Cemetery in West Virginia and the Florence National Cemetery in South Carolina are candidates for expansion provided suitable land is made available for that purpose.

Grave space for new interments is available in 57 national cemeteries; 48 national cemeteries are closed to new interments. Ten additional cemeteries are expected to close by 1986. Our cemetery in Hawaii, the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, will close to in-ground interments in October 1982. Because there is no possibility to expand that cemetery, the VA is seeking alternatives for providing grave space in Hawaii. In August 1981, after a VA investigation of 17 sites on the Island of Oahu, two sites of excess federal properties were identified as having the greatest

potential for a new national cemetery. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared after which a decision will be made on the feasibility of establishing a new national cemetery in Hawaii.

The State Cemetery Grants program, which complements the National Cemetery System, was authorized by Congress in 1978 (title 38, section 1008, United States Code) specifically to alleviate the shortage of burial plots in certain geographic areas. The program accommodates veterans who live far from a national cemetery and who wish to be buried in their home state. A total of $10 million has been approproiated so far for the program. Eight grants totalling $1.3 million have been awarded to four states: Arizona, Illinois, Maine, Maryland. Eleven applications for grants from ten states in the amount of $6.7 million are pending. Overall, a total of 24 states have expressed interest in submitting initial or additional applications for federal assistance. Because of budgetary constraints at the state level, however, and the longer than anticipated time taken by the states to prepare and complete applications, the State Cemetery Grants program has not proceeded as expeditiously as expected. We think it is an excellent program and we strongly encourage participation by those states in which it is not feasible for the Federal Government to establish a national cemetery.

And now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to review some of the changes we have instituted as a result of tightened fiscal policies to ensure the most efficient and most economical use of our cemetery lands.

In February 1982, Administrator Nimmo approved the adoption of a reduced gravesite size policy for our national cemeteries. The 4' by 8' gravesite, which will be used in new national cemeteries and in the new burial sections of existing cemeteries, will result in reduced development and maintenance costs per gravesite and will ultimately extend the longevity of our cemeteries.

Simultaneous with the reduced gravesite size, the VA will now provide flat markers in all new burial sections and in our new cemeteries. This plan will provide less costly monuments and will facilitate maintenance operations.

The cancellation of our plan to construct additional columbaria for cremated remains is another economy measure that will result in substantial dollar savings. The Administrator recently approved the concept of garden niches in national cemeteries for the interment of cremated remains. This plan will provide for the effective use of cemetery land that is otherwise unsuitable for the interment of casketed remains. Garden niches using three-foot square plots will be located in national cemeteries, wherever feasible, along the perimeter fences of the cemetery, on hills or along walkways. this adaptation of otherwise unusable cemetery land will extend the longevity of national cemeteries and reopen those cemeteries that have been closed to the interment of casketed remains.

Through the creation of garden niches, four of our closed national cemeteries in California will reopen within the next few months. The Grafton National Cemetery in West Virginia, which has been closed for new in-ground interments since 1962, is another facility with adequate land space where garden niches may be used.

One other notable change in our headstone and marker program was made through the expansion of our data processing capabilities. In fiscal year 1981, we furnished over 247,000 markers to mark the graves of veterans and dependents buried in national cemeteries and of veterans buried in private cemeteries. Automatic data processing will help expedite the ordering and delivery of government-furnished headstones and markers and will reduce dramatically our response time to inquiries. Ultimately, by reducing paperwork, the VA will be able to provide better and faster service to veterans and their families.

And now, Mr. Chairman, I will address our effort regarding the contracting-out requirements of OMB (Office of Management and Budget) Circular A-76 as it relates to the Department of Memorial Affairs. In accordance with the OMB Circular, the VA examined the operation of the national cemetery system to determine the extent to which we can contract-out certain activities. It was determined that contracting-out would be limited to the maintenance of cemetery grounds, buildings and equipment, where feasible and cost effective.

The Baltimore National Cemetery was selected as the pilot station for organizing and conducting the review process. The established procedures for conducting the in-house review will then be used to develop cost reviews at other national cemeteries.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you again, sir, on behalf of Robert P. Nimmo, the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, for the opportunity to appear before you and your Subcommittee today. I will be pleased to answer any questions.

COMMITTEE QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO PAUL T. BANNAI, CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION

Question 1. I note from your opening statement that by 1990, you project 70,000 burials in national cemeteries. Since that is some 8 years off, it seems that planning for this eventuality should begin soon. Will the cemeteries now in being and planned be sufficient to provide for the projected interment? If not, what are your plans?

Answer. Our new regional cemeteries are expected to have available grave space for the next 40 to 60 years. Planning adequate grave space to meet the burial needs of veterans and their families is an ongoing process in the VA. Periodic surveys are conducted at our non-regional cemeteries to locate additional gravesites where possible; reservations (made before 1962) are reviewed to determine any cancellations; cemeteries are expanded, wherever feasible, through the acquisition of donated land that is adjacent to the cemetery and suitable for cemetery purposes; garden niches are planned wherever possible to assure the full use of all cemetery land not otherwise usable for casketed remains In addition, the State Cemetery Grants program complements our National Cemetery System and helps serve veterans' burial needs. We do everything possible tc ensure that the burial benefits to veterans provided by law are readily available to them.

Question 2. I note your plans to reopen some of the closed cemeteries with the establishment of garden niches. What cemeteries will reopen and will there be any construction costs involved?

Answer. Initially, four national cemeteries on the west coast (in California) will reopen; Golden Gate, Fort Rosecrans, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Garden niches may be located in any national cemetery that has land space unsuitable for the in-ground burial of casketed remains; for example, along slopes or on walkways or along the perimeter of a fence, etc. There would be no construction costs involved.

Question 3. How about the Grafton National Cemetery in West Virginia—Why has the VA opposed its expansion?

Answer. The VA has consistently supported the expansion of the Grafton National Cemetary. It is VA policy, however, to consider only donated land that is suitable for cemetery purposes and adjacent or contiguous to the cemetery to be expanded. In the case of Grafton, adjacent land was offered for purchase and could not be accepted, and the land offered as a donation was not adjacent or contiguous and therefore could not be accepted either. Development of the latter tract of land would be tantamount to establishing a new national cemetery. The VA has informed the W. Va. Congressional Delegation that it would be pleased to consider adjacent land (the Walnut Street parcel) if it were offered as a donation. The VA also proposed the alternative of locating garden niches in the Grafton cemetery for the interment of cremated remains. Garden niches along the perimeter fence and on the sloping portions of the terraces at Grafton would provide hundreds of grave spaces for cremated remains and reopen the Grafton National Cemetery.

Question 4. How many cemeteries, and please identify those that will be studied under the A-76 process? Why were regional cemeteries excluded from this?

Answer. All non-regional cemeteries with annual maintenance costs exceeding $100,000 will be studied. This represents a total of 17 national cemeteries to be studied during fiscal years 1982 and 1983, as follows: Baltimore, MD; Beverly, NJ; Dayton, OH; Long Island, NY; Wood, WI; Chattanooga, TN; Fort Sam Houston, TX; Fort Bliss, TX; Fort Leavenworth, KS; Fort Rosecrans, CA; Fort Snelling, MN; Golden Gate, CA; Los Angeles, CA; National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, HI; San Francisco, CA; and Beaufort, SC.

The regional cemeteries are our busiest cemeteries and high quality of maintenance must be assured. These cemeteries were specifically excluded because of their unique position in the National Cemetery System as National Shrines. In addition, the Department of Memorial Affairs must retain a regional capability for support to satellite cemeteries in the event of contractor default.

Question 5. What savings are anticipated from the automation of the headstones and markers applications?

Answer. The savings anticipated will be primarily cost avoidance savings. The number of applications to be processed are steadily increasing—from 268,000 in fiscal year 1980 to an estimated 290,000 in fiscal year 1983. This automation will result in a reduction of paperwork and should enable us to complete the fiscal year 1983 workload with the same number of personnel as in fiscal year 1980. Based on our workrate standards, this would represent cost avoidance employment savings of about six personnel and would significantly improve service to the veteran and

family. Service would improve in timeliness of applications processed; accuracy in ordering; and timeliness of response to status inquiries from applicants.

Question 6. For the record, would you discuss the purpose of your legislative proposal to permit VA to "provide contribtions for construction projects on land adjacent to and facilitating safe ingress and egress with national cemeteries? Is it not really an obligation of the state and local governments to assume the safety of facilities in their locations?

Answer. While land areas immediately outside of national cemetery boundaries are not the legal responsibility of the federal government, any existing hazards or hazardous conditions on contiguous roads or walkways could endanger the safety of visitors to the cemetery and result in adverse criticism or actions against the federal government, particularly the VA. In many instances, needed safety improvements are deferred at the state or local government level because of budget constraints or a lengthy budget approval process.

Statutory authority does exist (title 38, U.S. Code, section 5008) in the case of VA medical facilities under which the Administrator of Veterans Affairs "may make contributions to local authorities toward, or for, the construction of traffic controls, road improvements, or other devices adjacent to a medical facility if considered necessary for safe ingress or egress."

Our legislative proposal would provide similar authority to the Administrator to assist in accomplishing improvements for the benefit and greater good of our national cemeteries.

Question 7. What is the status of the State Cemetery Grants Program? How many States have received grants to date? What do you believe should be done to obtain greater participation by the states in establishing state veterans' cemeteries?

Answer. The grant program has elicited a high degree of interest; however, States have been slow in implementing the program due primarily to budgetary constraints and the lack of incentive. The grants are based on a 50/50 Federal-State payment ratio of the cost of extablishing, expanding, or improving a state-owned and operated cemetery. There is no provision to assist States in defraying the cost of operation and maintenance. To date, four states have received six grants totaling $1,155,000: Arizona, Illinois, Maine and Maryland. Eleven applications from 10 states in the amount of $6.7 million are pending. A total of 24 states have expressed interest.

The States could well argue that consideration should be given to increase the Federal payment ratio from 50/50 to 60/40 or to some other acceptable ratio. Another inducement might be the payment of a reasonable amount to help the States meet cemetery care and maintenance costs.

At least from the States' viewpoint, these incentives would make the Federal/State relationship more equitable and would invite greater State participation in the program.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN L. EDMISTON, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee: It is a pleasure to appear here this morning on behalf of the 706,000 members of the Disabled American Veterans to discuss our views on the operation of the Veterans Administration's National Cemetery System.

Mr. Chairman, we commend you and the members of the Subcommittee for this timely exercise of your legislative oversight function and we trust that our remarks will prove beneficial to your important deliberations today.

Before I proceed with my remarks regarding the National Cemetery System, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the enactment of legislation during the first session of the 97th Congress (Public Law 97-66) which authorizes the VA to furnish appropriate memorial headstones or markers for placement in a national, state, local or private cemetery to commemorate those veterans whose remains have not been recovered or identified, were buried t sea, were donated to science, or were cremated without interment of any ashes.

Additionally, this law also directs the Veterans Administration to set aside suitable areas within national cemeteries to honor these deceased veterans, as well as, those veterans and armed service personnel who are listed as missing in action.

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the Veterans Administration operates and maintains the largest federal cemetery system as a result of Public Law 93-43, which

consolidated 82 Department of the Army National Cemeteries and 21 VA Hospital Cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Administration on September 1, 1973.

Today, the National Cemetery System consists of 107 cemeteries located in 35 of the contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

Of the 107 cemeteries, grave space is available in 55. Fifty-two cemeteries are considered "closed,"—meaning that they are completely filled or that only the interment of veterans in previously reserved grave sites or the interment of eligible family members in occupied grave sites can take place.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Chairman, that eight states contain only closed cemeteries leaving 29 states and Puerto Rico with the 55 open cemeteries. However, the distribution of these open cemeteries is rather uneven.

For example, the states of Illinois (5), Tennessee (4), North Carolina (4), Arkansas (3), Mississippi (3), Kansas (3), and Texas (3) contain 25 of the 55 open cemeteries in the system, with the remaining 30 open cemeteries distributed among the other 22 states and Puerto Rico.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, that leaves 21 states with either no National Cemetery or the National Cemetery within the state is closed.

There is no doubt that the early development of our National Cemetery System, prior ot 1973, occurred in a sporadic and haphazard fashion.

Due to the lack of a centralized authority to provide guidance in the development for long range expansion, the system was very much out of correlation with the major population centers of America by 1973 when the VA took control of the system.

Since the VA takeover of the National Cemetery System in 1973, three new National Cemeteries have opened in Calverton, New York; Riverside, California; and Bourne, Massachusetts. Currently, four others are under construction or planning at Fort Custer, Michigan; Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; Quantico, Virginia and Fort Mitchell, Alabama. The Fort Custer Cemetery is scheduled for opening this spring and the Indiantown Gap Cemetery this fall, with the Quantico Cemetery slated for opening in the spring of 1983.

We have also learned, Mr. Chairman, that early this summer the Veterans Administration plans on reopening the Golden Gate, Fort Rosecrans, San Francisco and Los Angeles National Cemeteries for the burial of cremated remains only.

Additionally, the Administration's Fiscal Year 1983 budget request contained a proposal to develop an additional 14,800 grave sites at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minnesota.

Except for the development in existing National Cemeteries, the current VA program of expansion of the National Cemetery System is based on the philosophy that one National Cemetery should be constructed in each of the ten designated federal regions and by the end of 1982 this regional expansion program should be half completed.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, the DAV has held the view that this regional concept of expansion is far too restrictive and not realistically in tune with the long range aspect of veterans' burial needs.

Our organization, in accordance with a resolution adopted by the delegates to our most recent National Convention, believes that expansion of the system should be based on a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one National Cemetery in each state. Every eligible veteran, we feel, should have the right to seek burial in a National Cemetery that is reasonably close to the area in which he lives to facilitate personal maintenance and visitation by his survivors.

To further support our position I would like to quote an excerpt from a Program Evaluation Summary Report dated June 13, 1980, entitled: "National Cemeteries, Headstones and Markers": The National Cemetery System buried 37,013 decedents in fiscal year 1977 and 36,743 in fiscal year 1978. Approximately 71 percent of the deceased buried in the system during these two years were veterans or active duty decedents and 29 percent were spouses or dependents. *Around 80 percent of those buried in National Cemeteries lived within 50 miles of the National Cemetery in which buried* (emphasis added).

We believe that in the long term, with the rapidly aging veteran population and with the growth and shift in our nation's population centers, a National Cemetery in every state is a recognized and realistic necessity.

We trust that you will give serious consideration to these thoughts, Mr. Chairman, and if you agree, advocate expansion of the National Cemetery System on a state by state basis.

While the DAV advocates and seeks your support for expansion of the VA's National Cemetery System on a state by state basis, Mr. Chairman, we also recognize

the current economic crisis which exists in our government today and the fiscal constraints within which this Subcommittee, and indeed the entire Congress, must work.

Therefore, given this atmosphere of fiscal austerity—one that may continue for sometime in the foreseeable future—we would suggest to the Subcommittee that greater utilization of the matching grants to state program for the construction, expansion or improvement of state veterans' cemeteries may very well be one avenue by which the federal government can offset the cost of new National Cemetery construction and still meet veterans' burial needs; and at the same time, provide the states with the opportunity to share in the nation's obligation to veterans.

Recognizing the significance and the important role of the state veterans' cemeteries—in terms of providing veterans cemetery burial space within close proximity to their families and the cost-effective use of federal taxpayer dollars that supplement this program—we believe it is wise, as well as prudent, for the United States Congress to continue reasonable financial support, within the present fiscal constraints, for this necessary program.

That completes my testimony, Mr. Chairman, and again I wish to thank you and the members of the Subcommittee for allowing the Disabled American Veterans to present its views on this most important subject.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. STANFORD E. PARRIS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to express my support for the construction of the Quantico National Cemetery in Quantico, Virginia.

I am pleased by Mr. Bannai's statement that the Quantico National Cemetery will be open for interments in the spring of 1983. It is my understanding that construction is now underway to develop 31,400 gravesites and provide administration buildings at the Quantico National Cemetery. It is also my understanding that this cemetery will be a cemetery for Veterans and will not be transferred to Army authority as an extension of the Arlington National Cemetery.

Veterans in the Washington metropolitan area are very enthusiastic about the opening of the Quantico National Cemetery particularly the availability of gravesites at Quantico since Arlington National Cemetery has limited space for interments. Also Quantico National Cemetery will be open for all veterans who served in the Armed Services and received an honorable discharge.

I do have one problem that I would like to address to the Subcommittee, Mr. Chairman. I would like to stress to you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, Mr. Bannai, the problem of an entrance road leading to the Quantico National Cemetery. Currently, there is a two-lane road leading to the cemetery however I do not feel that this will be sufficient once the cemetery is open to the public. I would hope that the Veterans Administration will consider widening this road during the construction of the cemetery.

I commend the Chairman for holding these hearings at such an opportune time and thank him for letting me express my views before the Subcommittee.

STATEMENT OF PHILIP R. MAYO, SPECIAL ASSISTANT, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the privilege to present to this distinguished Subcommittee the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States with respect to oversight of the National Cemetery System as administered by the Department of Memorial Affairs of the Veterans Administration.

Mr. Chairman, the VFW has been mandated for a number of years as currently embodied in Resolution No. 778, a copy of which is appended to my testimony, to seek the establishment of an open national cemetery in every state so that veterans my be interred reasonably close to their survivors. This is also one of our priority legislative goals, and the delay of its implementation serves to prevent veterans from seeking the use of such facilities through the VA and to seek them through other sources, generally at greater expense. Twelve States do not have a national cemetery: Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming.

Moreover, in five of the states that have at least one national cemetery, casketed interments are no longer being accepted. Alabama has one national cemetery and it is closed; Arizona, one, and it is closed; Maine, one, and it is closed; Maryland, three,

and they are closed; and New Jersey, two, and they are closed. Not only do we believe that providing an open national cemetery in every state is the responsibility of the Federal Government, inasmuch as veterans were inducted into military service by that Government, but also that the maintenance of such cemeteries would be best served under Federal auspices rather than through other means.

Mr. Chairman, we note that the Veterans Administration has achieved its objective of designating one large national cemetery in each of the ten Standard Federal Regions and one close to Washington, D.C. Four of the designated cemeteries are still in the construction, design or planning stage: in Region III, the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, Pennsylvania, is scheduled to open in the fall of 1982; in Region V, the post cemetery portion of the Fort Custer National Cemetery, Michigan, is scheduled to open in the spring of 1982; the Quantico National Cemetery, Virginia, will open in the spring of 1983; in Region IV, the change of site location last year from Fort Gillem, Georgia, to Fort Mitchell, Alabama, has caused some delays in the start of construction. In addition, information available to us indicates that the Administrator has determined that the need for a new national cemetery exists in the state of Florida, and we are pleased that the site selection process for such is underway. Information available to us also indicates that certain closed cemeteries will be reopened for burial of cremated remains, and that all casketed burials in national cemeteries will be accomplished in grave sites 4′ by 8′ in size. It is anticipated that these measures will prolong the longevity of existing and new cemeteries.

As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, Public Law 95–476 authorized the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs to provide financial assistance on a 50–50 matching basis to states that wish to establish, improve, or expand their veterans' cemeteries, with any state being eligible to apply for such financial assistance for those purposes. The best information available to us indicates that more than 30 states have expressed an interest in the State Cemetery Grants Program, but only four states, due to state financial constraints, have participated therein. In addition, we do not believe in the need of costly shrines embracing hundreds of acres of land far from the homes of veterans as national cemeteries, but that small cemeteries would suffice, in most states, for the interment of veterans desiring a final resting place with their departed comrades and near their homes.

Mr. Chairman, it is projected by the VA that burials in national cemeteries will approach 100,000 in number by the year 2000. We believe this and other burial projections may well prove to be low. As you know, Public Law 97–35, the "Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981," eliminated eligibility for the VA burial allowance to all veterans except those in receipt of compensation or pension payable by the VA. It is our belief that, should this allowance remain unrestored, the demand for burial sites in national and state cemeteries will increase. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we wish to express our support for the increase in the FY 1983 budget request for the VA Cemetery System. To us, this indicates recognition of the demands that may be placed upon that system in future years; and, hopefully, a commitment to meet those demands.

Mr. Chairman, appended hereto are a number of resolutions adopted by the delegates to our most recent National Convention that are pertinent to this hearing. They are: Resolution No. 729 entitled, "Memorial Centers;" Resolution No. 751 entitled, "Opposition to Elimination of Burial Allowance and Veterans Benefits;" and Resolution No. 774 entitled, "Burial Benefit Allowance."

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman.

RESOLUTION NO. 774—BURIAL BENEFIT ALLOWANCE

Whereas, Congress has limited the $300 burial and funeral expenses benefit only to those deceased veterans who were in receipt of VA compensation or pension; and

Whereas, burial benefits would be denied to nearly 27 million previously eligible veterans; and

Whereas, a veteran who honorably served his/her country during periods of war and hostility has earned the right to a proper and respectful burial; now, therefore be it

Resolved, by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we seek the introduction and enactment of legislation to restore the burial benefit allowance for all veterans thereby underscoring the value of their special service to their nation.

Adopted by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 14–20, 1981.

RESOLUTION NO. 751—OPPOSITION TO ELIMINATION OF BURIAL ALLOWANCE AND VETERANS BENEFITS

Whereas, veterans of this nation's wars have been accorded proper recognition for their noble efforts in times of need by their country; and

Whereas, the citizens of this great nation rightfully agree to the granting of these small signs of gratitude to the veteran; and

Whereas, a burial allowance to a veteran's survivors is part of that gratitude. The monies for such being of minuscule proportion; now, therefore

Be it Resolved, by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we go on record as being unalterably opposed to the elimination of this allowance for burial expenses; and be it further

Resolved, that we strongly solicit Congress' support and restore the previously provided burial allowance to all veterans.

Adopted by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 14-20, 1981.

RESOLUTION NO. 729—MEMORIAL CENTERS

Whereas, The Veterans Administration Master Plans for National Cemeteries in California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia includes plans for Memorial Centers; and

Whereas, The Veterans Administration has included funds in their budget each year for such Memorial Centers and each year the Budget Review Board has deleted these funds; and

Whereas, Veterans Cemeteries need buildings that invite informality and provide a place for exhibits; and

Whereas, the Memorial Exhibit Buildings would be a link between the past and the present which would include a history of the region, a tribute to the armed services and to the veterans' acts of herosim—honor the dead and create an awareness of our history and national purpose; now therefore be it

Resolved, by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the construction of Memorial Centers at the said Cemeteries and request that the Veterans Administration place in their budget for the year 1983 funds for the construction of the Memorial Centers and that the Memorial Centers be constructed at the earliest possible date as proposed in Cemetery Master Plans.

Adopted by the 82nd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 14-20, 1981.

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